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U.S. officials question claim of poor Los Angeles security

By Edmond Jacoby
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If the Soviets were concerned with the safety of their athletes, they let no one in the United States know it.

Officials at the State Department and in Los Angeles said the Soviet Union never voiced that concern prior to the Soviets' announcement yesterday that they will pull out of the Summer Olympics.

With a unanimous voice, the White House, members of Congress, the State Department, Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley and Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates rejected the Soviet claim.

Commander William Booth of the Los Angeles Police Department said the Soviets did not talk about security with his department even after Chief Gates invited them to do so.

"We haven't heard any response from any Russian officials," he said. "They are not knowledgeable of the kinds of security measures we will have in place, so they cannot predicate not coming on their concern about security. We have good security."

Questions about safety at the games, however, have been raised by other governments, including:

- The Israelis, who are concerned about a repetition of the Palestinian terrorist attack that killed 11 Israeli athletes during the Munich Olympics in 1972.

- The Turks, whose diplomats have been under attack worldwide by the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, a Soviet-backed, Syrian-based group that began its killing spree in Los Angeles in 1973.

- The South Koreans, who asked for special protective measures in the wake of a bomb attack last October by North Korean terrorists that killed four members of President

Chun Doo Hwan's Cabinet in Rangoon, Burma.

In addition, State Department Counselor Ed Derwinski told The Washington Times there has been genuine concern within the U.S. government for the safety of the Yugoslavian team because of the presence of Croatian terrorists in this country.

The FBI has worked for five years to plan security for the 23rd Olympiad and has put together a specially trained Hostage Rescue Team as a response to the possibility of a terrorist act reminiscent of the Munich Olympics.

Security for the games involves hundreds of extra FBI agents along with beefed-up special operations by the Los Angeles Police Department and sheriff's office, other local law enforcement agencies and the U.S. military's super-secret Blue Light counter-terror team.

The Defense Department's commitment to securing the Olympics was budgeted at \$50 million and includes troop airlift capabilities with more than 100 helicopters reassigned to the Los Angeles area during the games.

Air operations by DOD and the Los Angeles police, which has increased its fleet of helicopters and airplanes by 60, has created potential problems in the air over the host city and led to the creation of a special air traffic control task force to keep civilian air traffic from becoming tangled with the security forces.

In addition, intelligence agencies are expected to provide additional information relating to any terrorist or espionage attempts at the Olympics.

On-site security measures include high fences, television surveillance cameras and other devices to limit unauthorized access to the Olympic Villages where the athletes will stay.

FBI Director William Webster

has publicly stated his concern for the safety of the games, but also has said his agency has "no specific intelligence" concerning threats to the athletes. And Los Angeles police have repeatedly said they believe they will record an unusually low number of crimes in their city this summer due to the presence of 16,000-plus law enforcement officers keeping watch over the Olympics.

Chief Gates assured representatives of nations participating in Los Angeles that "all those attending would be adequately secure—all of the athletes—and he invited Russians to come and review our preparations and to make any suggestions they felt were warranted," Cmdr. Booth said yesterday.

The invitation to review security preparations and make suggestions remains open, Cmdr. Booth said, insisting "the city will be a safe place. They need not be concerned."

"The Soviets do not understand a free society," California Democratic Sen. Alan Cranston told reporters. "They are afraid some of their athletes will defect. They expect hostile demonstrations."

"In terms of defections, if anybody comes to us for protection, we'll protect them. We do that for anybody in this city," Cmdr. Booth said.

"We can all speculate on the reasons [for the Soviet announcement], but I won't," Mayor Bradley said in New York. "If security is the reason, it is not based on fact. We have given them assurances numerous times that their athletes will be welcomed and will be protected."

Representatives of the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee and the International Olympic Committee met as recently as last week with sports leaders from the Soviet Union to assure them their athletes would be safe.